

## How to write an advocacy letter

### *Number 1*

**This is a business letter. Address it correctly.** If it is a letter to the editor, saying “Dear Editor” is acceptable. However, if you know the name of the editor (of a small newspaper) or the editorial page editor (of a large newspaper), use it, especially on the envelope and inside address of the letter. The name, and the mailing address, can usually be found on the editorial page of the newspaper.

Elected officials should be addressed as “The Honorable” in the inside address block, and then by their title in the greeting (i.e., The Honorable George Jones, Dear Senator Jones).

### *Number 2*

**Get to the point.** Within the first paragraph, tell them what you want (“Vote for SB 100”) and why (“because it will save lives”).

### *Number 3*

**Tell your story.** The request for their help will be more effective if you can tell a personal story in your letter (“I know the ravages of tobacco use because. . .”). In the words of self-described corporate storyteller Evelyn Clark, “Stories improve communications of important messages because they touch the heart as well as the mind, and that emotional connection makes a message memorable. When you tell me a story, there’s a part of it that reminds me of my own experience, and so the lesson stays with me.”

### *Number 4*

**Stay on track.** Stick with your key points and avoid bringing up side issues, especially in the first letter. You may write again, but don’t do it too frequently. Some newspapers limit the frequency of letters on a topic or from a writer. Policymakers can ignore too frequent correspondence from someone with whom they are not familiar, especially if the writer is not a constituent.

### *Number 5*

**Keep it short.** If possible, keep the letter to a single page. But don’t crowd the page by using tiny type or narrow margins. Make it visually easy to read. Many newspapers have a word count limit for letters to the editor.

### *Number 6*

**Include your name and contact information.** This is address and telephone number and maybe e-mail address. A public official may wish to respond or ask for more information. The newspaper may want to verify that you sent the letter.